



BILL RICHARDSON
GOVERNOR

State of New Mexico
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
Office of the Secretary
Harold Runnels Building
1190 St. Francis Drive, P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-6110
Telephone (505) 827-2855
Fax (505) 827-2836



RON CURRY
SECRETARY

DERRITH WATCHMAN-MOORE
DEPUTY SECRETARY

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Immediate Release

Contact: Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director
Phone: (505) 827-0314

Environment Department Investigating Theft of Radioactive Material

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is investigating the theft of a World War II-style ammo box containing two vials of radioactive material missing from a shipment delivered to east Texas.

At this time, authorities believe the material, which originated in Albuquerque, was stolen in Texas. NMED Radiation Control Bureau staff have been dispatched to investigate the theft and are working closely with the licensee, FBI, and the State of Texas Department of Health Services.

The vials contained 40 millicuries each of Antimony-124, a beta- and gamma-emitting material that can result in significant radiation exposure. Antimony-124 is also toxic. The materials were shipped through Clovis, New Mexico, and the Texas cities of Abilene, Austin, Dallas, and Tyler, with final delivery in Kilgore. Antimony-124 is used extensively in the oil and gas recovery industry.

“We don’t wish to alarm the public, only to ask them to be on the lookout for the ammo box or vials and to contact us if they think they may have seen it or have any information on its whereabouts,” NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. “The public’s knowledge and involvement is often key in these cases.”

The army-green container weighs 80 pounds, contains two 30-milliliter plastic vials labeled “radioactive” and is about half full of a sand-like substance. If anyone sees an item matching this description, they are asked to not touch or open it. Do not tamper with the ammo box or the plastic vials. The safest course of action is to keep a distance of at least fifteen feet from the material and immediately contact:

John Parker, NMED Radiation Control Bureau Chief, (505) 827-1080, or the Environment Department emergency number, (505) 827-9329, or voice mail, 1-866-428-6535.

Direct exposure to Antimony-124 can cause ulceration of the skin. Because gamma rays damage bone marrow, Antimony-124 can also reduce red blood cell production and lead to leukemia if exposed for a prolonged period. If ingested, Antimony-124 could be lethal. If anyone has come into direct contact with the vials, they are urged to immediately seek medical attention. Due to the small quantity of Antimony-124, the materials are not considered a terrorist threat.

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In accordance with state and federal procedures, notifications were made to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the FBI. Radiation authorities in adjoining states and Mexico have also been notified. The licensee and carrier (whose names are not being released for security reasons) have performed extensive searches and inventories of their facilities. The Albuquerque company, which holds a radioactive material license issued through NMED's Radioactive Control Bureau, also notified NMED of the missing materials. The company is offering a \$1,000 reward for information leading to its recovery.

Unlawful possession of radioactive material is a violation of the New Mexico Radiation Protection Act (Chapter 74, Article 3 NMSA 1978) and the New Mexico Radiation Protection Regulations (20.3 NMAC), under which violators are subject to criminal and civil penalties. The stolen radioactive material cannot be transferred or sold without filing legal paperwork.

Pictured below is a shipping barrel and ammo box with two lead shields similar to the one that is missing.



For additional information, contact John Parker, Radiation Control Bureau chief, at (505) 827-1080, or Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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